

Opposition to the Death Penalty

Background:

The death penalty is imposed in an arbitrary and capricious manner and studies have found that the location of a crime and the race of the defendant are big factors in whether the death penalty or imprisonment will be applied in a particular case. Approximately 80% of death row defendants have been executed for killing white victims, even though in society as a whole African-Americans account for about half of murder victims.

As of July 1, 2015, 19 states and the District of Columbia do not have the death penalty and another four states have a Governor-imposed moratorium on executions. In addition, the manufacturers of the chemicals commonly used in executions have refused to sell them for the purpose of executions. In response to this potential shortage of chemicals, the Virginia General Assembly has not only continued to carry the death penalty in its laws, but is also reconsidering the inhumane electric chair as a permissible form of execution.

There have also been many cases where DNA evidence has proven the innocence of people sentenced to death at a time when such advanced techniques were not available. Between 1976 and October, 2015, the US executed over 1400 individuals while 156 were exonerated – that is, for every 10 people who were executed, one was found innocent. Every crime-solving technology can be misapplied and has been replaced by even more accurate techniques, yet the finality of an execution leaves no margin for error.

As Judge Kozinski wrote for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, “[W]e have little more than an illusion of a death penalty in this country. ... Whatever purposes the death penalty is said to serve— deterrence, retribution, assuaging the pain suffered by victims’ families—these purposes are not served by the system as it now operates.”

In every state where a cost study has been conducted, the death penalty has been found to be more expensive than a system of life imprisonment. In Maryland, the cost of executing a person is three times the cost of life incarceration. In North Carolina, an execution cost \$2.2 million more than the cost of life incarceration.

In 2016, only 23 countries are known to have carried out executions, led by China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Pakistan. The US is one of only 5 highly industrialized countries to retain the death penalty, and our continued use of the penalty undercuts our moral leadership internationally. The death penalty is unworkable and does not serve its intended purposes.

Therefore, be it resolved that: the 2017 8th Congressional District Democratic Convention calls upon the Virginia General Assembly to abolish the death penalty in Virginia.